



Idaho Naturalist news

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The Idaho Naturalist News is a quarterly newsletter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program.

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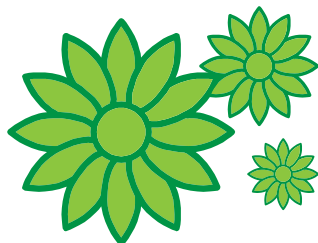
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Idaho Master Naturalists Volunteer over 9000 Hours in 2010

Sara Focht, IMNP State Coordinator, IDFG

Idaho Master Naturalists were very productive in 2010. Five chapters held their annual training and one new chapter was formed! Volunteers logged 9273 hours in 2010 making this year the most productive ever. The mission of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program is *to develop a corps of well-trained volunteers to work toward the stewardship of Idaho's natural environment*. Undoubtedly Idaho Master Naturalists have succeeded by volunteering for state and federal agencies as well as many not for profit groups. Below are the hours donated by each chapter for 2010.

Congratulations to all of Idaho's Master Naturalists and their chapter leaders for making 2010 a wonderful year!



Left photo: Jean Taylor collect data from her Swan survey. Photo by Angela Stormberg. Both Jean and Angela are Upper Snake Master Naturalists in Idaho Falls. Middle Photo: Cristine Casselman (Portneuf Master Naturalist) helps band burrowing owls. Right photo: Kyle Babbitt of the Upper Snake Master Naturalists skis near the Teton River for Swan surveys, photo by IMN Tony Appelhans.

Portneuf Chapter-Pocatello	518 hours
Sagebrush-steppe Chapter-Boise	1399.75 hours
BYU Idaho Subchapter-Rexburg	138.25 hours
Upper Snake Chapter-Idaho Falls	3994.50 hours
McCall Chapter-McCall	321.75 hours
Henry's Fork Chapter-Island Park	1687.75 hours
Treasure Valley CC Chapter -OR	12 hours
Wood River Valley Chapter-Ketchum	1201 hours



Snowshoeing to School

Janice Berndt, Sagebrush-steppe Master Naturalist

As our truck wound its way up Bogus Basin Road, there was a sense of excitement and anticipation. After several weeks of classroom instruction, the Sagebrush-steppe Master Naturalist class was heading out into nature. We were on our way to the Bogus Basin ski area to attend SnowSchool for a lesson in winter ecology.

As we gathered in the Frontier Point Nordic Lodge, everyone was buzzing like grade school kids on a field trip. The students who usually participate in these snowshoe trips are third to sixth graders. We were the first adult students to take the class. If there were any fears, our trip leader, USFS botanist Edna Rey-Vizgirdas, put us at ease right away. Think of your favorite elementary school teacher – that’s Edna. She gave us a few important instructions and then we moved outside, strapped on our snowshoes and headed out to the Streamside Trail. At the trailhead, we immediately plunged down a steep slope, trying to get the hang of walking with super-sized “feet.”

As we clomped along, Edna suggested looking for animal tracks in the snow. It didn’t take long to spot them. “What kind of animal made them?” she queried. “Where do the tracks start? Where do they lead?” She was constantly asking us questions. “What story is told by these tracks that begin in the middle of a snowy slope and end a few feet later where a delicate imprint of bird wing is visible?” We became snowshoe detectives, looking for evidence of life in the winter wildlands. From the large tracks of the snowshoe hare to the tiny tracks of mice and moles to insects walking on the snowbanks, we found that life goes on even when the temperatures are cold and the earth is covered by deep snow.

Edna pointed out other things along the way, too. Although trees don’t leave footprints in the snow, they have interesting stories. A dead Douglas-fir, naked of needles, revealed an odd branching manner. Although it was not visible from our vantage point, Edna told us that dwarf mistletoe had attacked the tree, causing the madly multiplying branch structure, much like the action of a cancer cell in the human body.



Further along the trail, Edna invited us to hug a huge ponderosa pine and sniff the rough bark. “Can you smell it?” she asked. In addition to teaching us how to walk in snowshoes, she had us looking, listening, smelling, and feeling our way along the trail.

Near the end of our trek, we ate lunch, seated on the snow, enjoying the warmth of the sun and the blue sky day. Ravens circled overhead, allowing us to eavesdrop on their energetic conversation. Snowshoeing was not an easy stroll through the woods. We had to work, trekking uphill and down for nearly two miles. But the

hands-on, eyes-on, ears-on, nose-on experience was the best way to learn the lessons that nature in winter has to teach us.

Boise National Forest educator Edna Rey-Vizgirdez (right) leads Sagebrush Steppe Master Naturalists on a snowshoe snow school hike at Bogus Basin.

Poetry and Pictures



Winter Bones

By Robert Ellis,
Sagebrush-steppe Master Naturalist

**Black rock and white ice
Cast a crisp stark reflection
Brief, winter beauty**

Kitchen Fox

During the summer the fox would come in and sleep on my kitchen rug on the cool tile floor.

She would also hang out while I was outside, rooting out an occasional mouse from under the porch.
(foxes eat many thousands of mice in their lifetime)

In spring she would move her litter around about every week to different dens in the area. One was just a few yards away from my place and I got to watch the little kits for about a week.

That's when I looked up info on having a fox as a pet, and quite assuredly dropped that idea as fox urine is something awful to deal with.

Photo and short story by Chuck Arpp, Wood River Valley Master Naturalist

Winter before last. She got the mange, and despite my efforts and the vets, (thanks anyway Doc), she disappeared.

But not before dropping by with her one year old son, who is gray with a white tail tip. He is occasionally around, but we haven't made acquaintances yet.

Well, I still really miss my little buddy. Here is a picture of her in my kitchen.



Volunteer Highlight: Roger and Leslie Piscitella

Sara Focht, Idaho Master Naturalist Program Coordinator



Roger and Leslie Piscitella serve as the Chairperson and Secretary (respectively) of the Upper Snake Master Naturalist Chapter in Idaho Falls. The Upper Snake Chapter is the largest and most active chapter in the state. Though I enjoy working with all the chapter leaders, I have especially enjoyed watching this chapter grow and thrive under the leadership of the Piscitellas!

Roger is a retired engineer from INL (38 years) and is a Master Gardener. When he heard about the IMNP starting in Idaho Falls, he decided to join and “immediately fell in love with the people and projects in this program” (Piscitella).

Roger works tirelessly on the chapter organization and planning. He is a very organized leader. When not working on the IMNP (I am not sure how he has spare time) he learns Spanish, exercises, grows organic food, and landscapes his yard with native plants!

In my life, I have never been involved with such wonderful people who share the same interests that I have.

-Roger Piscitella

Leslie works part time for an architectural firm in Idaho Falls. She and Roger bought fence pliers for each other (unbeknownst to each other) for Christmas last year because they loved the fence dropping and raising project at Sand Creek WMA!

Leslie and Roger have been married for nearly 42 years and have two children, Anthony and Julie.



Left: Roger and Leslie at Sand Creek WMA performing their favorite volunteer project-fence work!

Right: Roger taking down barbed wire fence for the winter wildlife migration.

The absolute best part about being a Master Naturalist is the friends we have made.

-Leslie Piscitella



Roger is an awesome leader and that feeling is shared by all our board members. Leslie has a gift for innovative ideas, and takes succinct, very useful minutes at our board meetings. Also, when it's her turn, makes amazing treats!

-Wendy Brockish, Upper Snake Master Naturalist

Altricial vs. Precocial Young

Sara Focht, Idaho Master Naturalist Program Coordinator

As a lover of nature and a pursuer of knowledge, you have probably run across the terms altricial and precocial when reading about wildlife and their babies. Having recently had a baby myself, the subject of helpless young is fresh in my mind. Animals can be rated along a continuum from “superprecocial” (animals up and running shortly after birth), to superaltricial (where the animal may take several years to be able to function on its own).

Animals that have young that can walk, run or swim shortly after birth (precocial) often have longer pregnancies or incubation times. They also tend to have fewer in a litter or clutch. Pronghorn are a good example of a precocial mammal. Fawns can walk and run short distances as soon as one hour after birth. In addition, most ground nesting birds, such as ducks and turkeys can fend for themselves shortly after birth.

Altricial animals are usually born “naked” (free of feathers or hair), blind, and helpless. Rodents, canines, felines, and humans are altricial, as well as most songbirds.



There is an association between brain size and the level of precociousness. Precocious animals tend to have larger, more developed brains at birth, but have less brain development from birth to adulthood.

Altricial animals are born with smaller, less developed brains. Their brains develop a lot from when they are born to when they reach adulthood.



Pronghorn photo by Steve Hillebrand from USFWS digital Images. Altricial bald eagle chicks await food from their parents. Photo provided by Dave Menke from USFWS digital images.

Exquisite Excrement

Sue Birnbaum, Sagebrush-steppe Master Naturalist

Who would find a presentation about human and animal fossilized feces and the packrat's waste pile interesting and informative? Master Naturalists, of course. About 25 Idaho Sagebrush-steppe Chapter Master Naturalists from the past two classes as well as the current class attended Tim McNeil's recent presentation on "Midden Mysteries." Besides being an Idaho Master Naturalist, McNeil is a Park Ranger for six months each year, leading tours through the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde National Park. Topics for his presentation included identification of wildlife droppings, stories that packrat middens tell, and determination of the diets of the Anasazis in the Mesa Verde pueblos by examining their "paleo" feces. Who knew there could be so much information derived from a small package of coprolite?

After all, excrement is included in one of Earth's great cycles: food plus digestion equals energy plus waste. Fossilized feces tell us about the lifestyles of animal and human. For instance, feces



Tim McNeil was the first Sagebrush-steppe Master Naturalist to complete his certification in 2010. He finished his 40 hours of service before heading to Mesa Verde for the ranger season.

containing crickets have been found in northern Utah, which may be from the Fremont culture. The Anasazis ate a lot of prickly pear cactus: According to Tim, 90% of the feces found at the Mesa Verde pueblos include this plant. There is also evidence of cannibalism in some feces found at Cowboy Wash near Mesa Verde, which raises a lot of questions as to the motive of some ancient peoples: Did they eat other humans for ritual or for necessary sustenance? We can also determine when the Anasazis' diet switched to that of domesticated animals.

The oldest human excrement in the New World was discovered in Oregon's Paisley Caves. DNA recovered from this coprolite dates back 14,300 years ago, and shows apparent genetic similarities to ancient peoples in Siberia or Asia.

We can learn many things about past climates by analyzing fossilized packrat middens. A midden is literally a refuse pile accumulated by packrats. A packrat collects plant material, including leaves, cactus spines, seeds, flowers and also bones. Most of the items collected are within 100 meters of its nest. It then impregnates this material with its viscous urine, which crystallizes, thereby creating a midden. Radio carbon

dating is used to determine the midden's age. A large midden discovered in Capitol Reef National Park was found to be 28,000 years old. Midden found in the Grand Canyon contains limber pine needles, indicating a much different climate at the time of deposition than that of today.

Middens are used to analyze past fire activity. Kerrie Weppner, a B.S.U. graduate student, is researching how vegetation change (as recorded in the middens) increases or decreases fire activity. Her records are primarily from charcoal preserved in sediments; she then uses fossilized middens to support the record by finding charcoal contained in them.

Tim's talk was educational and interesting. We got a few hearty laughs in, too. After all, one shouldn't get too awfully serious about fossilized feces, right?

Banding Burrowing Owls in Oregon



Cristine Casselman, Portneuf Master Naturalist, took these photos while working with biologist Mike Gregg of the US Fish & Wildlife Service out in Oregon at Umatilla Depot. The crew banded owls from their placed artificial burrows. Apparently the owls are making a big comeback at the Depot!



Treasure Valley Community College Opens Master Naturalist Chapter

Sara Focht, Idaho Master Naturalist Program Coordinator

The IMNP has infiltrated to a neighboring state by opening a small chapter at Treasure Valley Community College in Ontario, Oregon.

Five students from the Natural Resources Program signed up to add 40 hours of volunteer service onto their already rigorous class schedule to certify as Idaho Master Naturalists.

One of their first volunteer events was the annual “Ag in the Classroom” event for over 200 elementary school students from Idaho. The TVCC Master Naturalists taught stations including Solar Energy (Chase Bloom, pictured to the right), Wildfires by Vinnie Guglielmo, Ecosystems by Meredith Fisher.



TVCC Master Naturalist Chase Bloom teaches Idaho elementary students how solar energy can power five small motors. Chase and other TVCC Master Naturalists and Natural Resource students taught at the annual Ag in the Classroom event in New Plymouth, ID.

New Chapter in North Idaho!

The Pend Oreille Master Naturalist Chapter will begin April 19th! Chapter organizers Derek Antonelli, Jan Griffitts, Jon Bair, Gail Bolin, Don Childress, and Ann Wimberly have been tirelessly working on getting this chapter started. This chapter will be working at the Waterlife Discovery Center in Sandpoint in addition to other community projects. Welcome Pend Oreille Master Naturalists!



The Idaho Department of Fish and Game's Waterlife Discovery Center is located on the south shore of Lake Pend Oreille and includes an education building, a pond with fish viewing windows, lakeshore access, native plants, and a wetland hiking trail. Photo by Mark Taylor

Upper Snake Master Naturalist Program 'Catches Fire'

Wendy Brockish, Upper Snake Master Naturalist

"I've got a good feeling about this new class!" declared Roger Piscitella, Upper Snake Chair. And no wonder, with a record 32 enthusiastic enrollees and every chair occupied at class #1 on March 8 to hear IDFG Region 6 Non-game Biologist Rob Cavallaro speak.

Rob is a big champion of the IMN program. He already makes extensive use of Master Naturalist volunteers to fill the gap left by funding shortfalls on the non-game side. IMN volunteers help to relieve some of the workload of F&G biologists and technicians, thus freeing them up to pursue broader conservation goals. Rob deployed an impressive array of IDFG flow charts and pie charts to show the new class just where and how the IMN program fits in. He drove home the importance of recording volunteer hours, explaining the concept of "match" (donated time that is accorded a dollar value) which can then be leveraged for grant monies in support of non-game conservation programs.

Class of 2011 Upper Snake Master Naturalists will have the best grasp yet—*right from the get-go*—of how their generously donated volunteer time can benefit Idaho's natural environment, whether it's for IDFG, or any of the many other conservation organizations we serve. As more biologists are waking up to the benefits of using Master Naturalist volunteers, more conservation-minded members of our community are clamoring to join the program. Now isn't that a great "match"?

Upper Snake Chapter Presents and Displays and Wildlife Society Meeting

James Henriksen (pictured middle) from the Upper Snake Master Naturalist Chapter presented at the Wildlife Society meeting in Pocatello in late March. He presented the lead shot survey the Master Naturalists performed at Market Lake WMA and on the Idaho Master Naturalist Program.



Below is their display at the conference to show biologist how they can use the Master Naturalists for collecting data on wildlife projects.

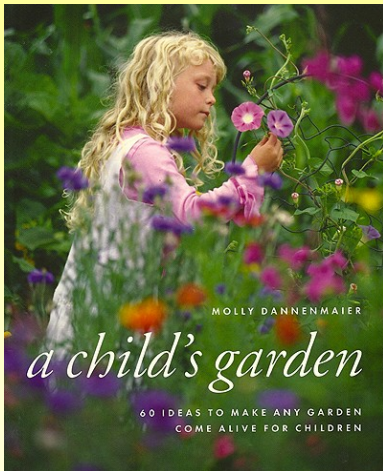


Book Review: A Child's Garden-60 Ideas to Make any Garden Come Alive for Children!

By Molly Dannenmaier

Review by Kevin Laughlin, Sagebrush-steppe Master Naturalist

One of the best things at our annual INLA Horticultural Expo each year is the book table. After a presentation or meeting with friends it's always a treat to ponder a new gardening book. This year I purchased Molly Dannenmaier's book, *A Child's Garden: 60 Ideas to Make Any Garden Come Alive for Children*. It is a joyful book, celebrating how children play. The great pictures and examples show how to incorporate practical, kid-delightful elements into your garden without sacrificing beauty. Timber Press again provides us with a good read and some new ideas for getting kids into nature.



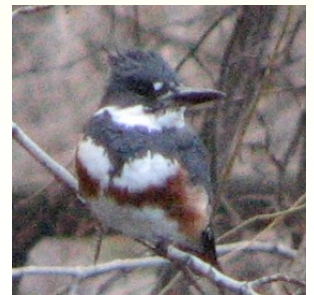
The main portion of the book focuses on the nine elements that Dannenmaier identified as important in children's play: water, creatures, refuges, dirt, heights, movement, make-believe, nurture, and learning. Each of these elements has its own section in the book complete with ideas on how the element can be integrated into one's garden.

In planning hardscapes, softscapes, and fun, Molly advances thinking outside the box and provides safety discussions that merit careful pondering when children go out the door into nature's living room.

Counting Birds on the Boise River

Joyce Harvey-Morgan, Sagebrush-steppe Master Naturalist

Every two weeks Lorrie Seuss and I team up to count birds along the Barber Pools and Barber Park to Bown Crossing stretch of the Boise River. My original goal was to support the IDFG winter bird count and accumulate volunteer hours for the Master Naturalist requirement. Little did I know how much this would help to hone my birding skills and how much fun it would be! Every other week since early November we have been greeted by some kind of "special treat"—a flock of herons taking off in flight together from the river, juvenile and adult bald eagles perched in the "eagle trees", playful buffleheads, gorgeous, elegant hooded mergansers, golden eyes playing/courting in the river, mute swans, ring-necked ducks (who named this duck anyway?), changing behavior patterns and plumage as the seasons shift, the ever present and vocal kingfisher, and many more. Snow, rain, cold, ice, and finally a warm day to bring out the field guide without freezing fingers, but always smiling and laughing with the pleasure of it all. As the songbirds increase along the banks and the leaves are starting to bud, we approach the end of March and the end of the counting project with some sadness. I'll be lining up to do this again in future years!



Male belted kingfisher. Photo courtesy IDFG

Roughing the Storm: a volunteer tale

Robin Dudley, Portneuf Master Naturalist

I have thoroughly enjoyed volunteering as a Master Naturalist. At the 2010 Environmental Fair, I helped teach kids how much fun recycling can be; we had Sack Races using re-used dog food bags. It was one of the most popular booths, and we all had a great time.

In November, I helped with a fish-printing workshop in the back room of Portneuf River Outfitters during a First Friday Art Walk. We helped people create beautiful art by pressing painted rubber fish onto plain T-shirts. The fly-tyers concentrated on their vises, the art-lovers mingled and chatted...it was very pleasant.

But the most exciting volunteer experience happened last July. This was a project organized by the City of Pocatello's Greenway Foundation. We were surveying people to find out about their use of the City Creek trail system. It was a cool Saturday morning, and I rode my bike up to the Cusick Creek trailhead, where I was assigned a two-hour shift at the survey table. There was a portable shelter set up over a large folding table and chairs, a big bowl of hard candy for survey-takers, a pile of clipboards and a box of surveys. I settled in with a crossword puzzle and waited for happy hikers to come along.

Then it started to rain. Warm, fat drops plopped onto the white fabric of the metal-framed shelter. No big deal; a little rain never hurt. I had another piece of candy and worked my puzzle, enjoying the summery scent of rain on dust. The wind picked up a little, and I set some big rocks on the pile of surveys to keep them from blowing away. About this time, a car pulled up. The passenger window rolled down and I could feel the warmth from their heater. It was a nice young couple new to the area looking for places to hike. I told them about City Creek, and they said they'd definitely come back later. Then I went back to my chair.

When the wind picked up, the shelter started to shiver. Just as I got up to check the stakes, thunder crashed, and I saw some lightning over Kinport. My bike, leaning on an old rail fence a few yards away, tipped over and splashed in a mud puddle. I stowed my crossword and stood up, grabbing the metal frame to keep the tent from blowing away, but it was no use. A huge gust bent the frame and caved in the white fabric; the table tipped over, and surveys and hard candy and clipboards and pens and blue rubber bracelets stamped "Save Our Aquifer" spilled onto the wet ground. A dented and rusty trash can rolled by like a noisy tumbleweed. Thunder split the sky. Soaking rain needled my already wet self. I had to laugh.

When the gal running the survey project returned at the end of my shift, I was sitting on my chair again, using the table to prop up enough of the tent to keep me out of the rain. The rest of the tent, formerly shiny white, was smeared with mud and stuck out crazily on its bent metal frame. The muddy candy was back in the bowl. The salvaged surveys were back in the box. I was almost done with my crossword puzzle, though the paper was transparent from rain and a little gritty with mud. "I can't believe you stayed!" she said as she gave me a ride home in her warm Subaru. Of course I stayed! I was having a great time. There is nothing like a little Idaho weather to warm this naturalist up from the inside out.

Idaho Master Naturalist Develops GONative

Jim Feldbaum, Wood River Master Naturalist

When I purchased my lot on the Big Wood River in Hailey, it was "unimproved" and sandwiched between my two neighbors' manicured turf lawns that extended right to the river's edge. My riparian area had been taken over by knapweed and burdock, and a tangle of thick vines had suffocated the river-side willows.

My plan to restore the riparian area and lawns to their native status was hampered by a lack of available information and knowledgeable local guidance. The information was out there, but it was scattered among our valley's many organizations and clubs. The valley was rich in master gardeners and professional landscapers, but most were used to business as usual as "native landscaping" had never gained acknowledgement much less traction.

Participation in the Idaho Certified Naturalist Program was my inspiration for the GoNative program. GoNative is dedicated to the promotion of sustainable landscape through the use of native and drought-tolerant plants. By partnering with local and national agencies, nurseries and landscapers, a resource center will be hosted at the Sawtooth Botanical Garden. A GoNative lecture series is underway and GoNative is an active partner in one of Hailey's major redevelopment projects. Soon homeowners and landscape professionals will have a one-stop source for the information that two years ago I had to scramble for.

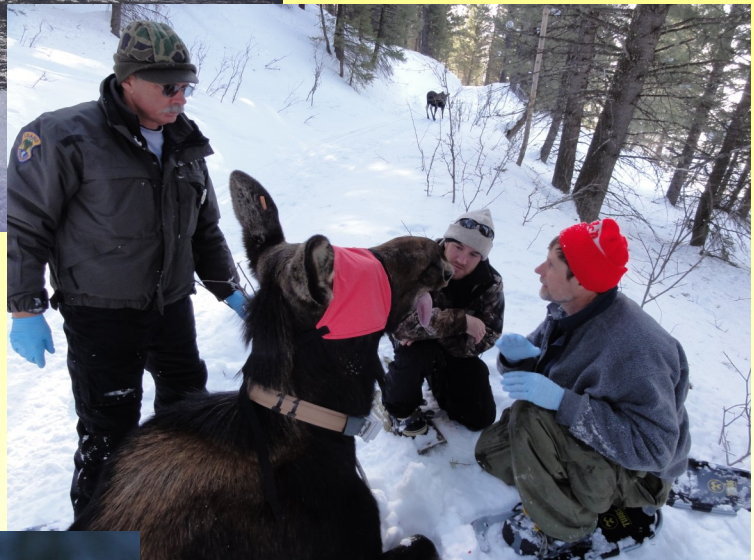
In the meantime, my riparian area has returned to native. The willows are again hearty, the noxious weeds are gone, and each season heralds new perennials and grasses. The conversion of my lawns into native biomes is underway with each employing appropriate irrigation techniques.

With the help of my classmates from the naturalist program, a website is under construction and an extensive data base is being assembled. Go Native. Plant one plant, save one drop of water (maybe many more), and volunteer.!



Native plants on Jim's property. Look for more on the GONative Project in future editions of Idaho Naturalist News.

Photo Gallery



Top: Seven cygnets and two adult swans. Photo by Evan Tibbott, Master Naturalist.

Middle: Moose collaring expedition by IDFG employees. Henry's Fork and Upper Snake Master Naturalists participate in this project by performing track surveys. Photo Courtesy, IDFG.

Bottom: Kitchen Fox (see page 3) by Chuck Arpp, Wood River Master Naturalist.

A blog and photos of the Wood River Master Naturalist Class can be found at: <http://www.chuckslog.blogspot.com>